

The UK Left Blogosphere: staring defeat in the face

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It seems to me that the Leftwing blogosphere is as knackered as Gordon Brown's poll ratings.

I have just been to (half – I had to get back home early, I am a single parent) a [meeting](#) where [Sunny Hundal](#) had been trying to find common ground with a group of leftish bloggers.

At times it felt like a digital re-enactment of that scene in [Life of Brian](#): “No we're the people's front of Judea” etc.

The Online Socialists have various problems.

No-one reads them. [Guido Fawkes](#) and his wicked Right-wing pals are far more entertaining and they know how to write for an online audience: scurrily, succinctly, directly. They are much more committed and actually contribute facts, stories and vitriol to the debate.

Power without responsibility?

The Left bloggers want to change the world but they don't want any responsibility. In this they are a mirror image of the right-wing blogosphere in the States.

[Georgina Henry](#) from the Guardian made the important point that the Left is in opposition to the Government. So it is much more fun to be a right-wing blogger. What does [Iain Dale](#) do when his party gets in to power? I suspect he will be as slavishly pro-Cameronite as he is now. More interesting will be what Guido does. I suspect he will adopt the knee-jerk impossibilism of the current left-wing blogosphere.

A feminist surprise

One pleasant surprise tonight were the Feminists from “[The F-Word](#)”. Here was a bunch of people who actually seemed to enjoy blogging and who hope it might change things. They seemed to have a good business plan. They knew their audience and had a sensible expectation of what they might achieve.

But much of the bit of the meeting that I was there for was taken up by false concerns. There was a lot of bleating about lack of resources. I'm sorry, but the blogosphere is cheap. This Great Movement that built the Trade Unions and fought Apartheid didn't need an Arts Council grant.

They were also obsessed by old categorical issues. “Are they journalists or campaigners?” asked one intelligent audience member. Sunny Hundal gave a good answer that might have come out of my book [SuperMedia](#) (but I don't think he's read it, so give him the credit). It's perfectly possible to be both. You can use Online facilities to bring people together to investigate an issue and to report it to a community of people who then go on to take action.

Curious spectacle

It is what Right-wing bloggers/activists have been doing for years. Look at the way that the Conservative bloggers got behind David Davis. Even the Left has got caught up in that digitally-inspired admixture of online comment and activism. Hence the curious spectacle of old Left-Liberals like [Anthony Barnett](#) being charmed by the former Tory Home Secretary.

It would be fun and easy to tease the the F-Word Feminists about some aspects of their political correctness. So here goes. I can't believe that one of them started going on about gender imbalance 20 minutes in to the meeting, but she was right. Both of the first two [speakers](#) were classic dull male [bloggers](#) who either wanted to show off their arrogance or their [impotence](#).

It was funny (in a nice way) to hear how the [Feminists](#) were struggling to spend the little income they had raised via Amazon sales referalls. One member admitted that the website doesn't have a bank account. Another pointed out that it is difficult to find a good Feminist cause to donate to that doesn't cause divisions – give it to an anti-pornography campaign and the pro-porn Fems complain.

I respect the [Feminists](#) because they seemed to have enthusiasm and a decent website that wasn't just about waving political penises around. As a middle-aged white heterosexual male I realise it is not aimed at me but I can recognise integrity when I see it.

Where's the change?

But overall this meeting does seem to feed in to the thesis that I was airing [before](#).

There really does seem a possibility, outlined in an American context by Matt Bai's book [The Argument](#), that the blogosphere is a place where political activists go to play instead of to effect real political change.

This goes against what I have written about, albeit cautiously, in my new book [SuperMedia](#). I suggest that a combination of mainstream and public journalism can reshape political communications.

I should not judge Online political journalism on one (partial) meeting in Clerkenwell. Who knows what will change when (or if?) Labour loses power. But for both Right and Left online there remains an overwhelming question: is digital a distraction or a democratic development?

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